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MAKING ART DEMOCRATIC

AN ACCOUNT OF THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF THE MINNESOTA STATE ART SOCIETY, SEPTEMBER 7-12, 1914

BY HARVEY B. FULLER, JR.

ONE hundred and twenty thousand people from every corner of Minnesota in one week visited the Eleventh Annual Exhibition of the State Art Society! An account of the Tenth Annual Exhibition, held early last spring, was printed in *ART AND PROGRESS* for June, 1914. That the next exhibition of the same organization should follow within six months requires a word of explanation. This explanation will present the exhibition's chief point of interest: *making art democratic*. The intrinsic merit of what was displayed, from the standpoint of art values, warrants particular notice; but the adoption of a new and unique plan for its presentation, the success of the initial endeavor, and the splendid results which a continuance of this new policy seems to promise—this phase of the exhibition calls for special emphasis.

Briefly stated, the object of the Minnesota State Art Society is to "foster and promote the industrial arts" throughout the commonwealth. The Society is concerned not only with the producer-artist, but with the consumer-public as well. The work of the Society is made possible by legislative appropriations. The encouragement offered does not apply to the fine arts alone; in fact, it is in the applied arts that the Society's service is perhaps even more important. It is due largely to the understanding and ability of its director, Mr. Maurice I. Flagg, that the practical application of art, as related to Minnesota's resources, has been demonstrated with such signal success during the two and one-half years of his directorship. The architectural competition for model farmhouse plans which the Society held a year ago was a splendid example of the real service rendered to the State; and

the published results of this competition were heralded all over the country.

What has proved to be the most notable and perhaps the most convincing activity of the Society, for the reason that it reveals at one time and in one place the wide scope of the work regularly carried on, is the Annual Exhibition. This embraces the work of Minnesota artists in painting, sculpture, etching, architecture, ceramics, photography and the various handicrafts; supplemented by loan exhibitions of the work of eminent American artists and craftsmen from without the State. Heretofore the annual exhibition has been held late in the winter or early in the spring. The plan has been to assemble the exhibit in St. Paul, the capital of the State, and the headquarters of the Society, where for several years it has been displayed in coöperation with the St. Paul Institute. After a week in St. Paul the exhibition has been transferred to Minneapolis where the Society of Fine Arts has tendered similar offices of coöperation. Following its display in the Twin Cities the exhibition has traveled about the State, including stops at three or four of the smaller towns; a different circuit being arranged for each year.

This scheme has been productive of good results, but the governing board of the Society, bearing in mind its purpose to serve the whole State—to reach the greater number of people—felt that it did not make the benefits of the exhibitions as widespread as was desired. Lack of time and funds made it obviously impossible to have the exhibition travel in a comprehensive way about the State. To present it, then, on an occasion when people from all parts of the State might be assembled was the thought suggested by the Annual Minnesota State Fair and



ONE OF THE GALLERIES AT THE MINNESOTA STATE FAIR

Exposition. Nothing in Minnesota approaches this event in point of attendance and the general geographical distribution of the homes of those who see it. This fair, devoted to advancing the agricultural, industrial and educational interests of the State, is held each year during the first or second week of September. It has been established for many years, occupies extensive grounds and permanent buildings, and is the largest institution of its kind in the country. The average daily attendance is about 75,000, a considerable proportion of this number hailing from the outlying rural districts of the State. The fair grounds are located midway between the Twin Cities.

Accordingly, the governing board of the State Art Society and the State Fair Management entered into an agreement early last summer whereby, for a period of at least three years, an annual exhibition of the Minnesota fine and applied arts will be held on the grounds during fair week. The State Fair executives, on their part, realizing what an added attraction the art exhibit would afford, were liberal in furthering the plan. A twelfth of their publicity budget was devoted to advertising the display of art

objects. They erected this summer, solely for the purpose of adequately housing the exhibition, five new galleries which are spacious, admirably lighted, and appointed in a manner to provide an effective background for the art objects shown. This approved and modern setting is in marked contrast to the unsatisfactory conditions under which former exhibitions have been held.

In the minds of some who are devoted to the promotion of art, it was felt that a great, crowded fair, with its multifarious distractions, could hardly afford a congenial atmosphere for an important exhibition; that the end of the summer is not a propitious time to expect the best response in matters relating to art, and that the great number of visitors at the Exposition (a total this year for the week of some 350,000 by actual tally!) could not be regarded as significant because of their casual, incidental interest. However, making due allowance for such considerations, the governing board of the State Art Society feels that the new plan makes it possible for the exhibition to reach thousands of people visiting the fair, who view the art display with serious interest, and who in no other

way could become acquainted with the activities of the Society. It seems quite evident that the wider contact thus provided will furnish a direct and helpful stimulus toward enhancing art in Minnesota, both from the standpoint of the producer and consumer. Surely such efforts as these make for the "democratization of art."

Altogether, this first exhibition under the joint auspices of the State Fair management and the State Art Society was very encouraging. Mr. Flagg and Mr. J. C. Simpson, Secretary of the State Fair, who were active in the inauguration of the scheme, consider that it was a wholly gratifying experiment. They felt certain that succeeding exhibitions will have greater value. The governing board of the State Art Society are in hearty accord with the project. The four Chicago artists, Miss Bessie Bennett, Mr. Albert Fleury, Mr. Leonard Crunelle and Mr. H. Leon Roecker, who served as a jury of selection and award, were much impressed both with the quality of the work submitted by Minnesota artists and the practicality of the new plan for exhibiting it.

Just a word in conclusion relating to the art objects shown. To achieve an exhibition up to the standard of those held the last two or three years was difficult this time owing to the State Art Society's exhibition last March. The matter of having Minnesota artists submit new work so soon thereafter, and during the summer season, was not a favorable circumstance. The decision to change the time and place of the Annual Exhibition was arrived at quite suddenly, and the time left to bring the plans to fulfilment was short. Nevertheless, through his enthusiasm and efficiency, Mr. Flagg succeeded in obtaining a very gratifying response from the artists of the State. This made it possible for the jury to select work which was quite on a par with, if not in some respects superior to, that which has been seen in the best of previous exhibitions. As before, cash prizes, this time amounting to \$625, were offered and awarded by the jury. In addition to the work of Minnesota artists, a representative collection of some twenty-six canvases by leading American artists was shown through arrangement with the American Federation of Arts.

ART IN TRADES*

BY WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN

THERE are some persons who think that painting and sculpture are all there is in art worth considering. If that were so I might as well stop right here, because the less statues there are on furniture and the less pictures there are on carpets and hangings the better.

I am going to just tell you very simply something of my own experience, and some of the conclusions that I think can be fairly deduced therefrom. When I graduated from Yale University I started work as a carpet salesman. Customers

used to come in and describe the style of their room, the color of the woodwork, the hangings and the furniture, and then they would ask the salesman's recommendation regarding the color and design of the carpet. I was a perfect ignoramus. I would make some excuse, go around the corner and ask the advice of one of the older salesmen. Afterwards I would ask his reason for his recommendations. Their suggestions were usually excellent but they had no studied reasons. I made up my mind that there

*An address made at the Fifth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Arts, Chicago, May 23, 1914.